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SUBJECT: ISCI STRATEGIC DIALOGUE: JUNE 30 MEETING

Classified by Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha,
reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (S) Summary: The fifth meeting of the political committee of the USG/Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) strategic dialogue met for two hours on June 30. Embassy Political Counselor headed the USG team, which included Deputy Political Counselor, Embassy Legal Adviser, and ORA representative. Vice President Adil Abdel Mehdi headed the ISCI team, joined by ISCI Council of Representatives (CoR) members Humam Hammoudi and Jalaladin al-Sagheer. ISCI is unhappy about what they perceive to be continuing USG "doubts" about them evidenced by continuing Coalition Force detentions of ISCI and ISCI-affiliated Badr Corps members. All three believe they have expended political capital to bring ISCI closer to the U.S. but have nothing to show for it. ISCI wants the U.S. to deal with them in Shia-dominated areas the way it deals with the Kurds in the north. ISCI representatives welcomed Political Counselor's proposal to consider focused, joint U.S./ISCI efforts in specific locations in Iraq to advance stability and promote redevelopment, and to use the political committee as a "think tank" to develop actual plans for cooperative action. End Summary.

ISCI Complains About USG "Doubts" and Detentions

12. (S) VP Abdel Mehdi emphasized that ISCI is a disciplined party with a vision and defined program. However, relations between ISCI and the USG are suffering from U.S. doubts about ISCI's independence from Iran; the VP denied that ISCI's "friendship" with Iran affects its independence. The VP noted that the USG had quickly opened relations with Sunni tribes in Anbar that promised to fight al-Qaeda, and he claimed the U.S. had supplied them with arms and other benefits. However, the U.S. military continues to target the ISCI-affiliated Badr Corps. "This pains us," said Abdel Mehdi, and strengthens extremists. The VP also called for discussion of what federalism vision each side has for Iraq.

13. (S) Hammoudi highlighted Coalition Force (CF) detentions of ISCI members. Many are security detainees held without charges. Al-Sagheer said the U.S. has an interest in good relations with ISCI because of its strong influence in Iraq, but the U.S. still doubts ISCI's intentions, based on "exaggerated" reports. Both Hammoudi and al-Sagheer implied that they, as moderates, had expended political capital within ISCI to bring it closer to the USG, but had not seen any benefit from it. Al-Sagheer also mentioned CF detentions of ISCI members and contrasted the U.S. supposedly arming Sunni Anbar tribes with what he portrayed as inadequate equipping of security forces in Najaf, an ISCI stronghold. VP Abdel Mehdi complained that detainee cases should be reviewed more frequently than every six months. The VP hoped that the USG would explain to ISCI the reasons for detentions of ISCI members and would bring to ISCI information about suspect ISCI members before detaining them so ISCI could purge its own ranks.

¶4. (S) Political Counselor noted that the CF power to detain derives from UNSCR authority, and that the CF treat all detainees equally. It is not possible to resolve the situation by simply having CF rely on ISCI's word; working this out is complex and will take time.

Militias

¶5. (S) Political Counselor noted that the USG and ISCI had the same overall strategic vision for Iraq as a democratic, stable country. However, this did not immediately translate into cooperation on the street level. Overwhelmingly-Sunni Anbar does not present the complexities of sectarianism present in provinces like Baghdad and Diyala, which have multiple Sunni, Shiite and al-Qaeda-linked groups. Without uniforms, all armed men look alike, and the goal is to get armed men off the streets. ISCI's expectation is that strategic dialogue would result in no detentions of those affiliated with ISCI, but it is difficult to translate political dialogue into dealings with armed men on the street.

¶6. (S) VP Abdel Mehdi said that Shiite-dominated southern Iraq is similar to Anbar in terms of the absence of sectarian conflict. The VP argued that it is inconsistent for the U.S. to target Badr while (he claimed) arming Sunni Anbar tribes and tolerating the Kurdish peshmerga. Even the Shiite Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, he claimed, could act freely. "ISCI should be rewarded, not punished," the VP said.

Reconciliation and Benchmarks

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¶7. (S) The VP complained that USG political benchmarks for Iraq are one-sided, only favoring Sunnis. Political Counselor explained that Iraq's Sunnis feel excluded from the GOI and if not made to feel included, would continue to be a problem for Iraq and the region. The process behind recent GOI political appointments has not been transparent and has fueled perceptions of sectarianism. VP Abdel Mehdi defended current appointments as only a re-balancing of a system in which Sunnis for years enjoyed disproportionately high numbers of appointees.

¶8. (S) Al-Sagheer said his understanding of reconciliation is different than the USG's. For example, in his view, de-Ba'athification has nothing to do with reconciliation; "many Ba'ath are already back."

Way Forward on USG/ISCI Relations

¶9. (S) The VP said that ISCI seeks the same type of relations with the U.S. that the Kurds have. Both he and al-Sagheer said ISCI is not one side among many, but rather, the dominant Shia faction both prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and in the current Iraqi political scene, and the "main component" of the GOI. The USG should consider ISCI's messages "essential."

¶10. (S) Political Counselor said the USG and ISCI should work toward political cooperation in specific geographic areas, and use the political leg of the strategic dialogue as a "think tank" to develop joint ideas and plans on large strategic issues including federalism, reconciliation, rule of law, elections and de-Ba'athification.

¶11. (S) The VP welcomed both ideas. He suggested an area where ISCI has "political weight," such as the southern cities of Nasariyah, Kut, or Diwaniyah. Al-Sagheer suggested Baghdad's Saidiya district.

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